

Economic Development & Transport Committee

EDT2 03-05(p6)

Date: 9 February 2005

Time: 9.00 am to 12:30 pm

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Title: Welsh Assembly Government Mergers with ELWa, the WDA and WTB

Purpose

1. To provide the Committee with the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Paper on the mergers of ELWa, the WDA and WTB.

Background

2. On 14 July 2004 the First Minister announced that the 3 ASPBs will be merged with relevant departments of the Welsh Assembly Government. Following this a team was established, comprised of officials from each of the bodies to be merged, together with representatives of staff trade unions, to outline organisational, operating and implementing arrangements for the mergers. On 19 January 2005, the Assembly Government published a formal consultation paper outlining the way forward www.wales.gov.uk/mergers.
3. The consultation period ends on 15 April. During that period the Minister for Economic Development and Transport and his officials will engage with relevant stakeholders to supplement the formal consultation process. This will build on the substantial process of engagement by the Minister with business interests following the announcement in July 2004.

Key Outcomes of the Mergers Process

4. The Consultation Paper outlines a range of benefits from the merger consistent with the broader Assembly Government reform agenda for the delivery of high quality, citizen-focused public services in Wales.
 - Accountability and External Advice – The abolition of ASPB Boards will establish a clear line of accountability to Ministers, who will be directly responsible for the full range of policy and delivery within their portfolios and for
 - ensuring that issues which cross portfolio boundaries are fully joined up and planned effectively. External advice, to inform and challenge thinking within the administration, will be built into the

new

structures.

- Improving Customer and Stakeholder Service - The mergers will create strong delivery arms of Government, linked with policy development, providing more coherent services based on the principle of a one-stop shop approach for customers and stakeholders.
- Demonstrating Results and Applying Best Practice – Robust performance and benchmarking data will be gathered to monitor progress and compare performance, both nationally and internationally, with the aim of driving up performance and becoming best in class. The mergers provide an early opportunity to adopt the best practices of each of the four organisations and to underpin their work with evidence from World-wide sources.
- Streamlined Delivery – Shortening the decision-making process and moving resources from administration to delivery will allow the new organisations to respond more quickly to learners, businesses and communities.
- Opportunities for Staff – The larger Assembly Government will give staff access to a wider job range; people will be able to progress as much for their delivery skills as for their policy-making skills.
- Organising to Deliver – Integrating Departments will lead to savings in the longer term which can be invested in improved front line services.

Next Steps

5. The next steps are to seek views on the way forward, to map out the detail of the changes required, and then to implement these. Within the Assembly Government a Change Programme Team has been established to co-ordinate some of the major change issues being addressed by the Assembly Government such as the Mergers Programme and the Location Strategy. Within the Economic Development and Transport Department a project board is being established to oversee the next steps in developing the new department and see it through to fruition.
6. Key issues to be addressed include:
 - consultation with external stakeholders, which will be continuing throughout the formal consultation process;
 - ensuring that the delivery of front line commercially orientated, customer focused business services is improved;
 - considering how the detail of the accountability and external advice arrangements will be taken forward, with proposals for a Strategic Advisory Panel covering the full portfolio and other specialist panels such as a Tourism Advisory Panel;
 - developing the future regional structures, and identifying the additional functions to be delivered at a regional level;
 - settling the detailed organisational structures of the new EDT Department, with a broad outline shown in Appendix A to the Consultation Paper;
 - ensuring that the subordinate legislation is in place to effect the mergers by April 2006.

7. In taking forward these tasks the EDT Department will liaise closely with other departments responsible for issues such as finance and personnel issues, and in particular with the new Education and Lifelong Learning Department given the need to ensure that there is coherent delivery of services across the two portfolios. While the merger will be given legal effect by April 2006, the process of merging the organisations will not be fully concluded by then, and the process will continue with benefits to come through over subsequent years.